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Lionel Messi – Player Focus

By Echeta Okeke

January 19th, 2006

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Another off the Argentine assembly line of "New Maradonas", Lionel Messi may be the first to live up to that unfair comparison. Where Javier Saviola, Juan Roman Riquelme and Pablo Aimar have unsurprisingly failed to match HIS high standards despite initial promise, Messi has shown that even at a young age he is able to carry the weight of expectant teammates and a nation on his shoulders.

Credit must also be given to his Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard for not rushing him into a starting place at Barcelona he is more than ready to hold.

"It is clear Messi is a talent, a future player, but I ask that everyone continues supporting him when he is out of the team because he is still very young." Rijkaard said in a recent interview. He continued:

"I'm convinced about him because I know he isn't paying attention to all the speculation in the media." He prefers to do his talking on the pitch."

In fact his three goals and one assist in nine league starts for Barcelona this season to add to his goal and assist in the UEFA Champions League back up his coaches claim, and at 18 years young we are only just starting to see glimpses of his enormous potential. Messi states:

"I want to keep on learning and I hope things go well for me. The thing is to help the team as much as possible."

These are the words of a young man with a focused head on his shoulders and more importantly good advisors around him. How many times have we seen the vultures swoop in on young prodigies sweet talking them and their parents into committing career suicide by sulking and demanding more playing time only to become no more than a trivia question five years down the road.

With the World Cup in Germany swiftly approaching Lionel Messi will definitely be one to watch if

selected for national duty.

Enrique Domínguez, Messi's former coach said "He could do things with the ball that defied the laws of physics. The only other person I have ever seen do that was Diego Maradona".

Let us all recall that Maradona himself did not come into his own until the 1986 World Cup in Mexico despite being tipped for great things in Spain four years prior. That World Cup was a general disappointment for Maradona as well as Argentina. Messi will be three years younger than Maradona was in his first World Cup appearance and it is important that we all allow Lionel to continue developing at his current pace without placing on him too much pressure for a teenager to handle. For his part Messi must maintain his enthusiasm and work ethic that has so far impressed his coaches and peers. If he can do that then the sky is indeed his limit.

Career Highlights

June 24, 1987 Born in Rosario, Argentina

2000 Lionel and his family move to Spain to help treat his hormonal growth deficiency

Signs for Barcelona at the age of 13

October 16, 2004 Makes his Barcelona first team debut against RCD Espanyol

May 1 2005 Becomes the youngest league scorer in Barcelona's history against Albacete when he scored his first goal at 17 years, ten months and seven days

June 2005 Helps the Argentina Under 20 team win the FIFA World Youth Championship scoring two goals against Nigeria in the Final

June 27, 2005 Renews his contract with Barcelona until 2010 with a 150 million buy-out clause

August 4, 2005 Receives his first call up to the Argentine national team

September 25, 2005 Obtains Spanish citizenship allowing him to play more games for Barcelona no longer being restricted by the non-EU player quota

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Convicting Children

By REXANNE MANCINI

Convicting Children by Rexanne Mancini

The conviction of 14-year-old Lionel Tate for first-degree murder and the subsequent life in prison sentence has been all but absent from the media lately. After the Florida court handed down the shocking sentence three weeks ago, it seems the media considers it old news. I am choosing to publish my feelings about this case anyway.

I cannot seem to overcome my strong feelings about this topic. I cannot tolerate the fact that a 6 year-old child was beaten to death yet I cannot accept a 14 year-old boy being sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. Where in the world did this sentence come from? This is a child we are talking about and a crime he committed when he was 12 years old!

The crime that brought this case to trial is appalling, yet sentencing a 14-year-old boy life in prison without the possibility of parole is ludicrous. This is not justice, this is cruel and unusual punishment handed down to a child. This is cowardice in its highest form and the jurors who convicted him should be ashamed. How could the state of Florida try this boy as an adult in the first place? He is not an adult nor should he be expected to assume the consciousness of an adult.

I see pictures of Lionel Tate and feel nothing but horror at the fear and uncertainty in his eyes as he looks at his mother, obviously trying to comprehend his situation. Yes, the fear and pain he inflicted on Tiffany Eunick is inexcusable. He should definitely be held accountable for his actions, however, he should be held accountable as the child he was at the time of the incident and still is. His mother should be held even more accountable. She was the adult in charge. Where was she when this little girl received 30 horrendous injuries? In hindsight, it's easy to say it was a huge mistake to leave her son alone with little Tiffany Eunick. But where was her head when she rejected the plea bargain of three years in a juvenile facility and ten years probation that would have been a more realistic sentence for this boy? Granted, Lionel Tate was a troubled child. His life had been littered with problematic behavior for quite a few years before this incident. All the more reason to hold his mother accountable for what clearly has been negligent parenting.

It might be unfair to blame Lionel's mother for his actions, however, as his parent, she needed to find a way to help her son adapt to society when he was clearly lacking adequate social skills. Tiffany Eunick would most likely be alive today and Lionel Tate a carefree teenager had she taken her parenting role more seriously. Again, hindsight makes it all seem so easy. Parenting is not easy. To raise a responsible citizen, we must be responsible parents. If our children are creating problems, we must take measures to find solutions for them to better cope with the world before they destroy their lives and the lives of innocent victims.

Rexanne Mancini is the mother of two daughters. She maintains an extensive yet informal parenting and family web site, Rexanne.com - <http://www.rexanne.com> – Visit her site for good advice, award-winning Internet holiday pages and some humor to help you cope. Subscribe to her free

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